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Israel to name forest in honor of Coretta Scott King

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Story Highlights

- At least 10,000 trees to be in Coretta Scott King Forest in northern Galilee
- Israeli official says forest to be living memorial to King's peace, justice legacy
- Congressional Black Caucus members: Forest to aid ties between blacks, Jews

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- Israel will name a forest in northern Galilee after Coretta Scott King as the country replants thousands of trees destroyed during last year's war with Hezbollah.

The Coretta Scott King Forest, which will contain at least 10,000 trees, will be a living memorial to King's legacy of peace and justice, Israeli Ambassador Sallai Meridor said Thursday at a Washington ceremony launching the initiative.

Two members of the Congressional Black Caucus said the initiative, which includes a fundraising partnership with black churches in the United States, would strengthen ties between black and Jewish people fostered during the early civil rights movement.

"Jews and blacks share a common historical bond of persecution and perseverance," Rep. Alcee Hastings, D-Florida, said as he and Rep. Artur Davis, D-Alabama, helped plant a ceremonial cherry tree at Faith Tabernacle United Holy Church near the Capitol.

The fighting between Hezbollah guerrillas and Israel last summer killed more than 1,000 in Lebanon and 159 Israelis. Israeli officials estimate that thousands of rockets launched by Hezbollah also scorched and burned some 2 million trees in northern Israel's Biriya Forest.

A section of that forest will be renamed for King, who died in 2006, nearly 40 years after the assassination of her husband, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. She would have celebrated her 80th birthday Friday.

Meridor said he was inspired by the Kings as a young child in Israel. "They made the world a better place, and we think made all of us better human beings," he said.

Israel already has a forest named in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. in southern Galilee. The Jewish National Fund, which also is backing the new forest, began that forest in 1976 with the planting of 39 trees -- one for every year of the slain civil rights leader's life.

The fund, a nonprofit organization that acts as a caretaker for the land of Israel, recently launched a \$400 million campaign to rebuild and reforest northern parts of the country.

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